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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Issues arising from the resolutions of the General Assembly at its fiftieth and fifty-first sessions, specifically calling for action by the United Nations Environment Programme

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to Governing Council decision 18/7 of 25 May 1995, provides information on issues arising from the resolutions of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly which are of relevance to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In areas where follow-up action to the resolution has not been indicated, this is provided in the reports of the Executive Director under the relevant agenda items. Information on issues arising from resolutions of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly will be provided in an addendum to this document.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the Executive Director's report and the actions indicated therein.

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ISSUES ARISING FROM THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FIFTIETH SESSION, SPECIFICALLY CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

1. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 50/110 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme", endorsed the report of the Governing Council of UNEP at its eighteenth session and the decisions contained therein. Four decisions were recognized, in particular: decision 18/1 on the role and priorities of UNEP; 18/5 on the in-depth evaluation of the programme on environment; 18/7 on environment and sustainable development, and 18/10 on good environmental housekeeping within the United Nations system. The General Assembly also requested the Governing Council to report on the role and activities of UNEP in the implementation of Agenda 21, in accordance with its mandate, and to submit that report to the General Assembly at its 1997 special session. The importance of sufficient and timely contributions to the Environment Fund was also noted. The General Assembly welcomed the efforts of UNEP to promote maximum and cost-effective utilization of the conference facilities in Nairobi. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly, a report on the role and activities of UNEP in the implementation of Agenda 21 will be before the Governing Council at its nineteenth session for its consideration with a view to submission to the General Assembly at its special session.

2. In its resolution 50/113 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21", the General Assembly decided to convene this special session for the duration of one week in June 1997 (the special session has now been scheduled for the period 9-13 June 1997). The decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to devote its fifth session to preparations for the special session was welcomed. The General Assembly also welcomed the decision of the Governing Council of UNEP to hold its nineteenth session early in 1997 with a view to making a contribution to the special session and invited all other relevant international organizations to contribute to the special session as well. The General Assembly invited the Secretary-General to prepare, for the consideration of CSD at its fifth session, a comprehensive report containing an overall assessment of the progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the implementation of Agenda 21 and recommendations for future actions and priorities, as a contribution to the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly. This report is currently being prepared under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), which is the inter-agency mechanism entrusted with coordinating follow-up in the United Nations system to Agenda 21, and will include the following:

(a) Concise reports on the progress achieved in specific sectoral and cross-sectoral areas;

(b) Country profiles showing the progress achieved at the national level;

(c) Major and emerging trends and issues within the framework of Agenda 21 and related outcomes of the Conference in the area of sustainable

development, including the environmental impact of activities that are gravely hazardous to the environment; and

(d) Recommendations on the future role of the Commission.

3. UNEP has been assigned, under the auspices of IACSD, the role of task manager in several areas of Agenda 21 (the areas covered by chapter 9 - atmosphere; chapter 12 - desertification; chapter 15 - biological diversity; chapter 19 - toxic chemicals; chapter 20 - hazardous wastes; and, together with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, chapter 40 - information for decision making) and has the responsibility to prepare the concise progress reports. In addition, UNEP provides inputs to a number of other reports on issues, of both a sectoral and cross-sectoral nature, in which other United Nations bodies have been designated task managers. The preparation of these progress reports is very demanding, in terms of both time and resources.

4. Following the agreements reached under IACSD, UNEP has taken a substantial role in preparing the major and emerging trends section of the comprehensive report being prepared for the special session of the General Assembly. As UNEP has not received any additional financial allocation to undertake this task, it has to be discharged within existing resources.

5. By its resolution 50/112 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa", the General Assembly welcomed the signing of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, by a large number of States and urged States that had not yet signed or ratified the Convention to do so. With regard to the subsequent sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, the General Assembly recommended that the first session of the Conference of the Parties be convened in June or August 1997. Relevant United Nations organizations, including UNEP, were requested to strengthen their support for the Convention's interim secretariat.

6. In its resolution 50/114 of 20 December 1995, entitled, "Desertification and drought", the General Assembly recalled its appeal to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNEP to continue and strengthen their cooperation in combating desertification, notably through support for the Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNSO) by the joint venture programme, and also welcomed their efforts to strengthen their cooperation through the UNEP/UNDP partnership to combat desertification. An appeal was made to Governments and other interested organizations to make contributions to relevant United Nations bodies, including UNSO, to strengthen their capacity to support activities to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in all affected developing countries and regions. The Secretary-General was requested to submit a report on the implementation of this resolution to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

7. Every effort has been made by UNEP to support the implementation of resolutions 50/112 and 50/114 within the reduced resources available to the UNEP programme "Caring for Land Resources" in 1996. UNEP provides support to regional meetings to prepare for meetings of the Intergovernmental

Negotiating Committee, as well as supporting the costs of a small number of participants attending these meetings, and is continuing to develop its partnership with UNDP in the areas of awareness-raising and desertification indicators. UNEP has offered to host and to provide administrative support to the Permanent Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification. The relevant documentation will be before the Council at its nineteenth session.

8. In its resolution 50/115 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind", the General Assembly noted with satisfaction progress in the process of ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and recognized the support given to the Convention's interim secretariat by various United Nations bodies, including UNEP. The resolution also endorsed the institutional linkage between the Convention secretariat and the United Nations, as advised by the Secretary-General and adopted by the Conference of the Parties, and expressed its appreciation for the support offered by Germany for the relocation and effective functioning of the Convention secretariat. The Assembly also urged Member States to pay promptly and in full their contributions to the Convention's trust fund. The Secretary-General was requested to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session on the implementation of this resolution.

9. UNEP continued to provide support for the Convention secretariat, including through scientific support for programme development as well as through the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). UNEP also continued to assist the Convention secretariat in its information programme, although, owing to financial constraints, the involvement of UNEP in that programme has been reduced and is threatened in 1997. UNEP provides one professional staff member - a legal advisor - to the Convention secretariat. It has also launched initiatives aimed at providing opportunities for the exchange of experience and information about jointly implemented activities during the pilot phase of the Framework Convention.

10. In its resolution 50/117 of 20 December 1995, entitled "International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction", the General Assembly noted with appreciation the specific measures contained in the report of the Secretary-General for the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World and its Plan of Action and called upon Governments and the organizations of the United Nations system to participate actively in the financial and technical support of Decade activities. While conscious of the need to avoid duplication of work among United Nations bodies dealing with early-warning capacities and taking into account those already in existence, including within UNEP, the General Assembly commended all relevant United Nations bodies for the constructive inter-agency approach they had applied in that area. It also invited the Secretary-General to take the steps necessary to make the early-warning data gathered under United Nations auspices readily available to the decision makers concerned at all levels. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly will review progress made in the implementation of this resolution.

11. UNEP agreed to share responsibilities in the area of early warning with the secretariat of the International Decade. UNEP assumes the role of

monitoring major environmental changes which occur over longer periods of time, such as climate change or ozone depletion, and which can lead to major natural disasters. UNEP is actively involved in the preparation of the report to the General Assembly on the implementation of this resolution. UNEP also participates in the system-wide Earth Watch Programme, whose role is complementary to that of the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction.

12. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 50/81 of 14 December 1995, entitled "World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond". The Programme itself, contained in the annex to the resolution, includes, among its proposals for action in the area of environment, an invitation to UNEP to intensify production of information materials illustrating the global dimension, origins and interrelated effects of environmental degradation and describing the outcomes of initiatives undertaken by various countries. UNEP is requested to continue its efforts to disseminate to and exchange information with major youth organizations. To that end, UNEP is preparing a second edition of its publication Young Action for the Future, an information booklet on the environment for and by youth. In early 1996, a second Regional Youth Forum was organized to train youth leaders in Africa on methods of developing income-generating projects. An African Youth Plan of Action was developed as a result of this initiative. In November 1996, UNEP, together with DPCSD, chaired the Sustainable Development Working Group of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system. The Forum recommended the preparation of a training manual on the environment and sustainable development for youth. Similarly, in 1997, UNEP will organize its biennial Global Youth Forum, providing an opportunity for thousands of young people worldwide to learn and share experience on community-based environmental action.

13. In its resolution 50/111 of 20 December 1996, the General Assembly welcomed the results of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, held at Nassau, Bahamas, from 28 November to 9 December 1994, and called upon those States that had not yet ratified the Convention to expedite their internal procedures of ratification. The Executive Secretary of the Convention was requested to report, through the Economic and Social Council, on the results of the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, and also to make these reports available to CSD.

14. UNEP is host to the Convention secretariat and provides the necessary scientific and technical support to both the secretariat and the various organs of the Convention, including the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Biosafety. UNEP has also taken a number of initiatives in the area of biological diversity, including the preparation and dissemination of the International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology, which were adopted at the Global Consultation of Government-designated Experts in Cairo, in December 1995.

15. The General Assembly, at its fiftieth session, also adopted resolution 50/24 of 5 December 1995, entitled "Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish

Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks". In this resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that reporting on all major fisheries-related activities and instruments is effectively coordinated and duplication of activities and reporting minimized and invited the relevant specialized agencies to cooperate with the Secretary-General to that end. An item entitled "Law of the sea", containing two sub-items relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, and to large scale pelagic drift-net fishing, is to be included in the agenda of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.